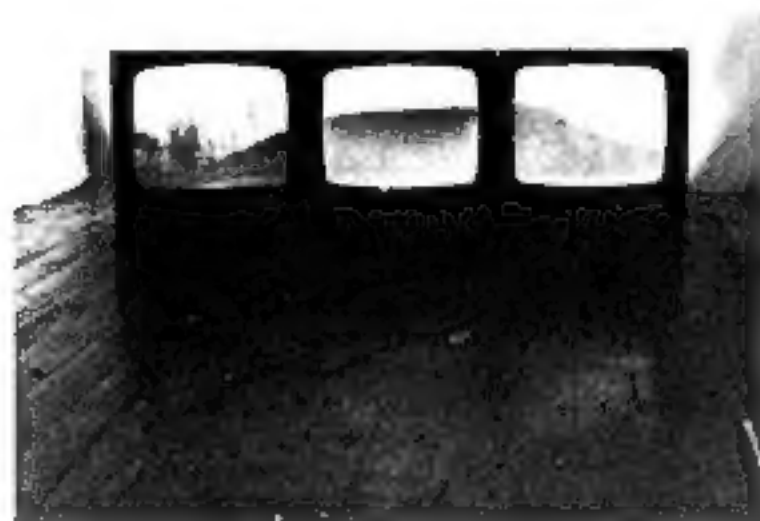


THE VIDEO WINDOW OF DAVIDSON GIGLIOTTI

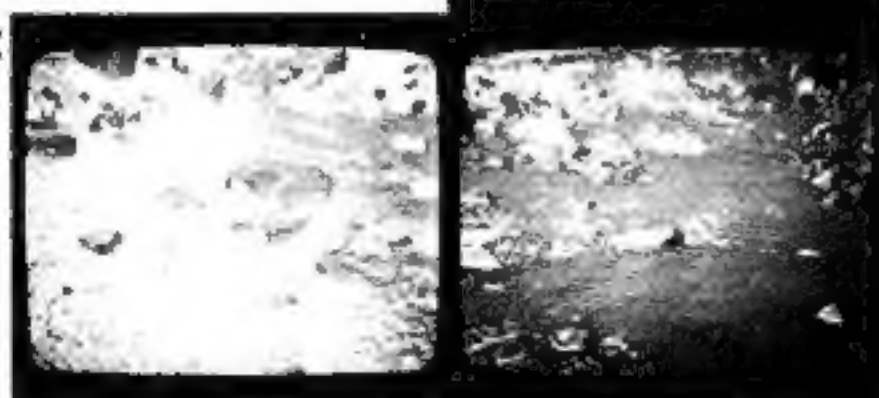
Russel Connor



Davidson Gigliotti, *Quaking Aspen*, 1973. Courtesy Media-Bus.



Davidson Gigliotti, *Winter Mountain*, 1973. Courtesy Media-Bus.



Davidson Gigliotti, *Structure of Dry Fly Fishing*, 1974. Courtesy Intermedia.

"Video" to my mind conjures up a hubbub of activity, daring feats, moments of beauty, and happy absurdity. But soon "adult experience" usurps the field to present a rather mysterious, untidy, and occasionally brutal competition called "video art." There are still moments of brilliant individual play, but the pitch of action becomes more frantic. The one mood which neither "video" nor "video art" suggests to me is serenity—until I encountered the work of Davidson Gigliotti.

The measured eloquence of Gigliotti's art owes as much to a family tradition in carpentry as it does to formal art training. In 1962 he abandoned a brief foray into journalism and part-time sculpture to become a professional carpenter. It is a craft which he still studies and practices. Carpentry, he has said, has given him an appreciation of elegant systems.

By 1969 he felt the need to return to art, which, by this time, had drifted away from the familiar constraints of object-making. Attracted by the work of Hans Haacke and other conceptual artists, he reserved his appreciation for art "practiced on a conceptual level" rather than for a particular style of art production. In that year Gigliotti purchased a video portapak as "an ideal vehicle" (though technically flawed) because it came closest to dealing with pure information.

Since then he has been making video tapes as a member of the Videofreex. Videofreex was a name that suited the times and style of the group, which then aspired to produce the sort of alternate television documentaries now being made by TVTV (Lord of the Universe). The group's current name, Media Bus, more accurately reflects their present central activity of spreading video liberally around the state in a series of training workshops supported by the New York State Council on the Arts, and serving as consultants in video applications to libraries, colleges, museums, and historical associations. They retained their original name as authors of an extremely valuable, no-nonsense handbook, *The Spaghetti City Video Manual* (Praeger, 1973) whose principal author was Parry Teasdale.

Some of the workshops are held at Maple Tree Farm in the Catskills where they have lived and worked since leaving Manhattan in 1971. Thanks to the warm encouragement of his colleagues, Gigliotti has been able to devote most of his time to independent pursuit of personal artistic goals. The path is not always video or identifiable as art; he has made hundreds

of drawings in search of a perfect free-hand circle, taken to the woods for a project involving labeling varieties of trees with their names in Latin and English, and drawn deep satisfaction from a period of planting white oak trees.

The profound peace in Gigliotti's multiple channel video works embraces a perpetually active universe. In *Quaking Aspen* (1973), the leaves of shifting branches ebb and flow in densely textured counterpoint to the movement of the clouds. It was taped in minute-and-a-half segments several times a day for a month with a fixed camera and edited down to twenty minutes. "Ideally, the video image should be like looking out an open window; the sound should be like sound coming in from an open window." As impatient as he is with the primitive resolution of the picture, Gigliotti admits to a paradoxical, romantic attachment to scan lines; his perfectly exposed, precisely focused close-up photographs taken off the tube are fine graphic prints in themselves.

Outside his window at Maple Tree Farm extends a flat section of roof; the surrounding hills present a wide panorama. Gigliotti assembled three video tape recorders and three cameras with long lenses attached to a moveable bar on the roof, and three monitors inside his room with which to check the alignment of the adjoining pictures. The cameras were under-scanned so that he could see the edges of each image in the viewfinder. The public result was a half-hour piece called *Hunter Mountain* shown at the 1973 Avant-Garde Festival in a baggage car at Grand Central Station.

In Gigliotti's most ambitious work to date, the intelligent window again looks out on nature, but this time the inquiring presence of humanity is strongly implied. It is as if all the lengthy observations of trees, mountains, and clouds, of the habits, whims, and strategies of nature, were a preparation for an examination of the ingenuity of man. *The Structure of Dry-Fly Fishing* (to be shown at the Kitchen in early 1975) considers his central interest—using video as a tool for the study of recurring human conventions, "in art and related areas."

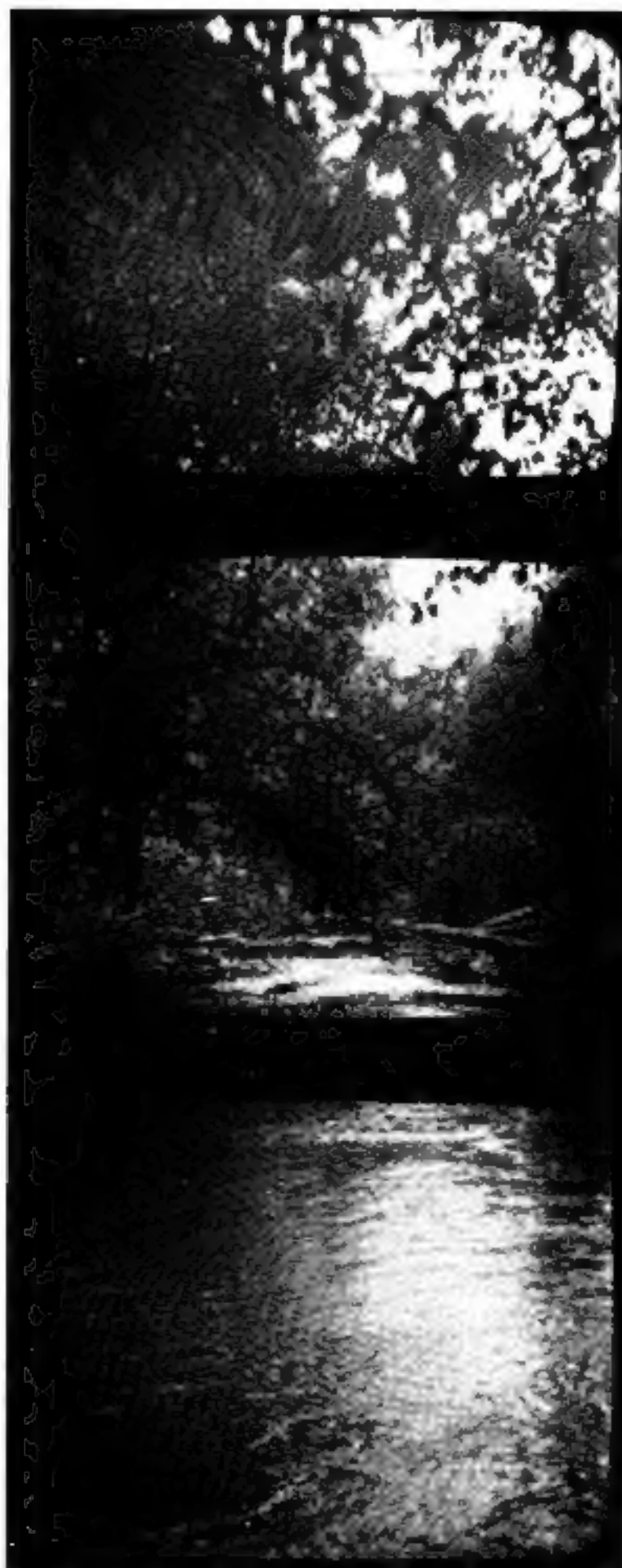
Structure of Dry-Fly Fishing is a complex video artwork on the order of a piece of sculpture. At its most apparent level it is a sixteen channel video landscape piece, composed of several three, four, and six channel elements. The program is twenty-five minutes long. Presented on the screens in information related to trout, the trout environment, the propensity of trout to eat mayflies as they hatch, and other material from which the structure of dry-fly fishing is derived.

Unlike most other fish, trout live close to man. They pay attention to the surface of the water and beyond because a large proportion of their food comes from there. They see the sky, the branches of overhanging trees, bugs that drop into the water, and mayfly duns hatching on the surface. They see humans going up and down the banks. As we developed a body of knowledge about them over the centuries, they too developed a limited body of knowledge about us. It became so that, in clear water, a baited hook was often too clumsy a ruse to override their natural caution. The present day sport of dry-fly fishing arose in response to this situation.

The essence of dry-fly fishing is mayfly imitation. The angler must present to the trout a tiny lure of the appropriate size, made of fur and feathers of the correct color, tied in imitation of a mayfly, usually in flight. It must land on the surface of the water like a newly hatched mayfly, without a splash. It should float with the current naturally, imparting no evidence of being attached to a line.

These and other parameters which add up to the rules of the dry-fly fishing system are the results of the observations and conclusions of thousands of anglers over several centuries. The literature of dry-fly fishing is immense.

It is the position of the artist that this elegant system, the



Davidson Gigliotti, *Structure of Dry Fly Fishing*, 1974. Courtesy Intermedia.

product of so many minds, contains within it many important elements relative to the way humans solve certain kinds of problems, and in fact provides important clues to the nature of human mentality. The artist hopes to provide, within the context of the piece, some of the information necessary to carry the viewer through the steps of observation and discovery, and to grant some insight into the dynamics of human structuring.